UCLA doctoral student sues over punishment for anti-genocide protests

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On August 26, Dylan Kupsh, a 27-year-old doctoral candidate in computer science, filed suit against the Regents of the University of California, two student-conduct administrators and UCLA Police Captain Jeffrey Chobanian, alleging a two-year campaign in retaliation for his open and constitutionally protected participation in five pro-Palestinian protests.

Kupsh claims that the proceedings resulted in his being barred from most campus activities for 291 days, suspended for two academic quarters and the withholding of his completed master's degree for more than 600 days, although he was only found responsible for two minor violations: failing to show his student ID (a BruinCard) when an officer demanded it, and failing to move out of the way of another student walking past him on a campus sidewalk. Kupsh disputes the second finding.

Kupsh is seeking to reverse the suspension, compel the release of his master's degree, punitive damages and attorney fees. He is being represented by lawyers from the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee and two local civil-rights lawyers, Thomas Harvey and Ben Ghargozli. The complaint charges the university with retaliating against him for his political views and denying him due process, including adequate notice of the accusations.

Kupsh is a member of UAW Local 4811 and an organizer with Labor for Palestine. He was among the most visible participants in the protests against the Gaza genocide at UCLA, frequently appearing at demonstrations without concealing his face. He has always discussed his case openly while other students facing similar proceedings have chosen to remain anonymous.

The suspension terminates Kupsh's teaching assistant appointment for the summer and fall quarters of this year, along with the salary, health insurance and tuition remission that accompany it.

The lawsuit cites an email sent in May last year by UCLA Police Captain Jeff Chobanian to Steve Lurie, the campus chief safety officer, describing Kupsh as "a known organizer and public face" of Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP), which the administration had already suspended as an organization.

Chobanian pressed for "firm and immediate action." Lurie relayed the message to two conduct administrators within thirty minutes, adding that "perhaps Jeff's narrative can help us make a determination on an interim suspension."

Nothing in the police captain's account described conduct—only a political affiliation and a recognizable face. The administration barred Kupsh from campus the following month pursuant to a reactionary UCLA policy that permits such an action before any evidence is weighed and without any determination that a rule was broken.

The exclusion was in place for 291 days, finally ending last March. Kupsh told the *Los Angeles Times* that it took half his life away from him, and that he could not so much as visit a neighbor living in university housing.

On the day the ban began, the administration filed a fresh set of accusations from a protest held in May 2025. Fourteen citations were issued against Kupsh between August 2024 and June 2025, covering five demonstrations. They alleged obstruction of walkways, disruption of university operations and refusal to comply with orders.

None are criminal accusations. Police arrested Kupsh at a demonstration in June 2024, but prosecutors brought no charge.

Campus tribunals disposed of the citations across five hearings between June 2025 and May 2026. These bodies consist of three members drawn from the faculty, staff and student body. The hearings and deliberations are conducted privately and guilt is determined under the minimal "more likely than not" standard. Twelve of the fourteen citations collapsed. The panels accepted that Kupsh had attended most of the demonstrations, but found the administration had not established that he directed them, issued instructions to anyone, or obstructed anyone's movement.

Despite Kupsh having already been excluded from the campus for more than nine months, the disciplinary board added a formal suspension, which began June 22, 2026 and

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runs through December 11. It covers the summer and fall quarters.

The master's degree Kupsh submitted for conferral in December 2024 has still not been granted. In addition, he cannot simply return to his doctoral program when the suspension lapses. He must petition for readmission to a program that he entered seven years ago and is two quarters from completing.

Of the 14,231 sanctions UC campuses issued in the 2023-24 academic year, suspensions accounted for only 3 percent, and they are usually reserved for the gravest offenses, such as violent conduct and repeated drug violations. Kupsh received one over an identification check and walkway obstruction.

The harsh treatment meted out to Kupsh is in sharp contrast to the kid-glove treatment for pro-Zionist counter-demonstrators. On the night of April 30, 2024, a mob of pro-Israel counter-protesters attacked the UCLA encampment for several hours. UCLA's own statement afterward described "a group of instigators" who "violently attacked students, faculty, and staff members." Campus police did not intervene for hours. A later independent review found the administration had been gripped by institutional paralysis. The following night, police cleared the encampment and arrested more than 200 anti-Zionist demonstrators.

The first arrest of a Zionist attacker came 23 days later. Edan On, an 18-year-old with no connection to the university, was booked on suspicion of felony assault with a deadly weapon after investigators identified him from video striking encampment occupants with a wooden pole, seriously injuring one. He was released the following day. District Attorney George Gascón declined to file a felony charge and referred the case to the city attorney. In April 2025, City Attorney Hydee Feldstein Soto charged On with misdemeanor battery and brandishing a weapon.

In April 2025, nearly a year after the attack, Soto announced the disposition of more than 300 referrals arising from demonstrations at UCLA and nearby USC. Two people were charged. Most cases, her office stated, were declined for evidentiary reasons or because of the university's failure or inability to supply the identifications needed to prosecute.

Kupsh was betrayed by the United Auto Workers bureaucracy. UAW 4811, which represents 48,000 graduate student workers, researchers and teaching assistants across the ten UC campuses, announced it would strike in May 2024 at several campuses, initially demanding amnesty for all students and workers disciplined or arrested over the protests, protection of political speech on campus, and divestment. After the state labor board twice permitted the strike to proceed, the university obtained a court order shutting it down.

The UAW bureaucracy abandoned the strike and Kupsh was left twisting in the wind.

Kupsh's suspension is the direct result of pressure from Washington. The Trump administration froze $584 million in funding to UCLA before a federal judge intervened, and has filed a series of antisemitism lawsuits and investigations, the third in May of this year.

Licking Trump's boots, the university activated a disciplinary system that has no prosecutor or jury and a minimal standard of proof.

Eighteen members of the Board of Regents are appointed by California governors to 12-year terms. Democratic Governor Gavin Newsom also sits on the board as an ex officio member. Every partisan statewide elected office is held by a Democrat, as are the offices of the district attorney and city attorney who declined to prosecute the attackers.

148 Jewish members of the UCLA faculty issued an open letter last March condemning the "insinuation and misdirection" through which student protesters have been branded antisemitic, and warning that UCLA was answering federal pressure with severe restrictions on academic freedom.

Secret tribunals, triggered by police assessments of a student's political views and prominence—now intended to crush opposition to genocide—will be turned against every movement against imperialism and the oligarchy in the future.

No section of the political establishment seriously opposes such repression, and the trade union apparatus will not defend union members. Students and academic workers defending democratic rights must turn to the international working class, the only force capable of defeating this attack, organizing independently of the union bureaucracy and both capitalist parties on the basis of a socialist perspective.

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